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Item No. 02
Halifax Regional Council
January 9, 2024

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed

Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: December 22, 2023

SUBJECT: **2023-24 Skilled Talent Recruitment and Retention Strategy Update:
Information Report**

ORIGIN

November 22, 2022 Regional Council motion (Item No. 16.2):

MOVED by Mayor Mike Savage, seconded by Councillor Lovelace

THAT Halifax Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to develop a strategy with the Halifax Partnership to proactively attract, house, and retain the skilled talent required to address our economy's acute labour shortages, with a focus on skilled tradespeople and labourers needed by the construction industry for housing construction.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

March 21, 2023 Regional Council motion (Item 15.1.4)

MOVED by Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Kent

THAT Halifax Regional Council:

1. Disburse \$208,572 (net HST incl.) to the Halifax Partnership in 2022/23 with funding from Fiscal Services to undertake enhanced and targeted international recruitment of skilled tradespeople and labourers needed by the construction industry to build housing, and to identify how local employers can help address the housing needs of its employees; and,
2. Report back to Council in 2023/24.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The Halifax Regional Municipality Charter 2008, c. 39, s. 2:

The purpose of this Act is to (a) give broad authority to the Council, including broad authority to pass bylaws, and respect its right to govern the Municipality in whatever ways the Council considers appropriate within the jurisdiction given to it; (b) enhance the ability of the Council to respond to present and future issues in the Municipality; and (c) recognize the purposes of the Municipality set out in Section 7A.

Under Section 71, Business and industrial development, the Municipality may:

(a) solicit and encourage the establishment and development of new, and the establishment, development and expansion of existing institutions, industries and businesses in and around the Municipality;

(b) publicize the advantages of the Municipality or any part of the Municipality and the surrounding areas as a location for the establishment and expansion of institutions, industries and businesses;

(c) pay grants to a body corporate for the purpose of promoting the Municipality or any part of the Municipality and the surrounding areas as a location for institutions, industries and businesses;

(d) prepare and disseminate information about the Municipality or any part of the Municipality and the surrounding areas for the assistance of institutions, industries and businesses intending to locate or expand in the Municipality or the surrounding area.

DISCUSSION

Unprecedented population growth in the Halifax region is putting increased pressure on housing supply and necessitating the development of housing at an increased pace and scale to meet current and future demands. A major factor impacting housing development is the shortage of skilled trades workers in the municipality and province. To help address this issue and reach the long-term economic and population growth goals of [People. Planet. Prosperity. Halifax's Inclusive Economic Growth Strategy 2022-27](#), HRM provided funding to Halifax Partnership (the Partnership) in April 2023 to develop and implement a one-year Skilled Talent Recruitment and Retention Strategy pilot program. The pilot was launched in June 2023 when a licensed immigration consultant and international recruiter joined the Partnership team to support the initiative.

Through this pilot program (branded as the Halifax National and International Recruitment Program), the Partnership has been working collaboratively with the province, industry partners, Destination Canada, and the business community to proactively attract skilled national and international talent to Halifax to meet critical labour needs with a concerted focus on in-demand skilled trades needed in the construction sector.

Pilot objectives include:

- Identify Halifax employers' skilled labour needs and key geographic markets to target for talent recruitment.
- Identify and meet with >1,000 job seekers at national and international recruitment fairs.
- Streamline and support the recruitment-to-settlement process for Halifax employers and out-of-province workers.
- Identify and recommend actions the private sector can take to address employees' housing needs.

To date, several key objectives have been progressed and/or achieved including:

1. *Hired a Partnership resource to support the recruitment and hiring of national and international talent to address critical labour shortages.*

In June 2023, the Partnership hired a licensed immigration consultant and recruiter to support the pilot. This team member works directly with Halifax employers and partners to:

- develop job descriptions that will attract candidates from different countries and cultural backgrounds;
- promote job openings, and Halifax as a place to live and work, at national and international recruitment fairs;
- identify the candidates that best match job requirements, pre-screen them, and provide employers with a shortlist; and
- guide businesses and candidates through the international recruitment and hiring process including the legal, regulatory, logistical, and settlement aspects.

Currently, the Partnership is the only economic development organization in Nova Scotia with a licensed immigration consultant and recruiter on staff which is a required role for matching international candidates to job openings and providing recruitment and immigration guidance to employers.

2. *Developed international recruitment strategy to support Halifax employers.*

The Partnership has developed an international recruitment strategy to educate and support local employers in successfully attracting and hiring global talent. Developing effective international recruitment strategies involves careful planning and consideration of global factors including a deep understanding of local cultures, labour market dynamics, and legal requirements. Flexibility, adaptability, and continuous improvement are key to achieving international recruitment goals.

The Partnership's labour market team supports employers with the following recruitment considerations:

- Defining objectives and goals
- Conducting market research
- Adapting employer branding and messaging
- Utilizing global job boards and platforms
- Cultivating relationships with local networks and partners
- Advertising in local and regional media
- Leveraging social media and online channels
- Developing partnerships with immigration and relocation experts
- Providing cultural orientation and support
- Monitoring and evaluating results

3. *Targeted outreach to Halifax employers*

The Partnership proactively reached out to over 500 Halifax businesses the organization supports through the Atlantic Immigration Program, the SmartBusiness Program, and as Investors (with a focus on outreach to construction and development related businesses) to promote the pilot and encourage participation. From October-November, employers submitted 35 job postings (some with multiple vacancies) for the Partnership to promote to candidates at national and international job fairs taking place in November and December.

4. Developed and executed a marketing and communications strategy to engage local employers in the pilot and attract talent.

The Partnership developed and continues to execute a skilled trade focused marketing and communications strategy to engage Halifax employers (specifically those in construction and development related industries) in the pilot program and to recruit talent from key national and international markets. Digital and traditional marketing campaigns have run on Meta (Facebook and Instagram), LinkedIn, Google Display, YouTube, in-market digital billboards, and on local radio. Marketing campaigns began in late October to support the labour market team's participation in recruitment fairs happening in November and December. Promotional collateral - including Living in Halifax videos and pop-ups - promoted Halifax as an excellent place to live and work and drove candidates to job postings on the Partnership's website. From October-December, there were 3,000 pageviews of the employer-focused [Halifax International Recruitment Program](#) page on the Partnership's website and over 2,780 pageviews of the [Building Careers. Building Communities.](#) talent recruitment page.

5. Collaborated with public and private sector partners to recruit national and international talent.

From November-December, the Partnership's labour market team participated in five national and international recruitment fairs in collaboration with industry associations, the Nova Scotia departments of Labour, Skills and Immigration and Acadian Affairs, Regional Enterprise Networks, and Destination Canada. The recruitment fairs took place in:

1. London Build Expo – London, United Kingdom (Nov. 14-17, 2023)
2. Destination Canada – Paris, France (Nov. 17-19, 2023)
3. Destination Canada – Rabat, Morocco (Nov. 22-24, 2023)
4. Toronto Building Show (Nov. 29-30, 2023)
5. Destination Canada – Virtual (Dec. 4-5, 2023)

The labour market team met thousands of job seekers and conducted over 475 interviews during the recruitment fairs, identifying a substantial pool of skilled trades workers and other internationally-trained professionals interested in relocating and working in Halifax.

Results to Date

To date, the Partnership's national and international recruitment efforts have exceeded targets fourfold with **approximately 4,000 candidates applying for promoted job opportunities**. Work is now underway to pre-screen and connect candidates to job opportunities. Candidates not selected by employers participating in the pilot will be presented to other Halifax businesses with labour needs. In addition to working with participating employers, the Partnership's licensed immigration consultant and recruiter is providing immigration guidance and support to other Halifax businesses to support their hiring of international professionals.

Next Steps

- **December 2023 – January 2024:**
 - Prescreening, shortlisting, and referring the best candidates to employers participating in the pilot.
- **January – March 2024:**
 - Support employers and selected candidates through the hiring and immigration process.
 - Identify and share actions the private sector can take to address employees' housing needs.

- Explore opportunities for sustainable funding with provincial and federal partners.
- **April – June 2024:**
 - Participate in additional recruitment fairs in key target markets with a focus on recruiting skilled trades workers.
 - Share lessons learned and best practices from the pilot with the business community and industry and government partners.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications for this report.

RISK CONSIDERATION

The pilot program addresses a known risk in Halifax - the lack of housing to meet population demands. The ongoing lack of housing stock will continue to exacerbate the economic insecurity of low-income individuals and families and could hamper Halifax's ability to attract and retain the workers needed to grow the economy.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Halifax Partnership was engaged in the writing of this report. The municipality's five-year economic strategy, *People. Planet. Prosperity. Halifax's Inclusive Economic Strategy 2022-27*, has been informed by engagements with and written submissions from more than 2,500 business leaders, residents, and partners throughout the municipality. The skilled talent and recruitment pilot program is advancing action #42 of the strategy – "With industry partners, undertake targeted on-the-ground recruitment efforts in other Canadian and international cities."

The Partnership is working with Halifax employers and industry and government partners to develop and implement the Skilled Talent Recruitment and Retention Strategy pilot program.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No environmental implications were identified.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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